

## **WHY THOUGHT OF MUSEUM DOES NOT TAKE ROOT IN ASIAN CULTURE? - A letter of condolence to late Professor Ganesh Vankhede**



Photo: Dr. Ganesh Vankhede, November 19, 2015, at Muthawa Center, Melghat Tiger Reserve

Dear Friend,

It was four years ago that I was able to see you in the meeting place of symposium on spiders of Mekong region held at Pakse, Laos, in November 2012. At the symposium, fifty scientists from twelve countries of Asia and Europe gathered to talk about the first, International Society for Arachnology in Asia. I was really shocked when I was informed the sad news about you on July 1, 2016, at the reception of the 20th International Congress of Arachnology held at Golden, Colorado, on July 2. Four years were too short to nurse our friendship. I am terribly sorry about your passing away and loss of a good friend from India, and wish to express my heartfelt condolence to all your family members.

At the second conference of the Asian Society of Arachnology held at Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2014, you invited the next (third) conference to be held at your hometown, Amravati. As a result of your careful preparation and support of your colleagues and friends it was realized in November 2015, and you gained a great success as the chair (see a fine report on the conference written by Kulkarni and Jäger in a Newsletter of the British Arachnological Society, No. 136, pp. 3-6, 2016). It was an impressive meeting full of pleasant memories. I thank you again for your courtesy and wish to praise your great efforts while fighting against presumably bad condition of health.

During an excursion in Melghat Tiger Reserve I had an opportunity to talk with you closely. This portrait was taken there on the morning of November 19. Why thought of museum does not take root in Asian culture? That was one of the questions we discussed. Although, around 1500 spider species have been recorded from this beautiful forest reserve as you told me, little voucher specimens were kept in any research organization such as the

museum. Students identify species after visual inspection and photographs, while they have restricted chance to receive permission to make specimens.

In the religion such as Buddhism or Shintoism, people worship the nature. In the Japanese forests behind temple or Shinto shrine, which often means the whole mountainous area, killing animals is originally prohibited. When you make investigations for inventory in such places, a special permission with generosity for science of the priest is necessary. Although Western scientific thought including culture of museum spread in Japan for 140 years, I recently experienced some Japanese arachnologists buried their specimens collected for a life in the soil from religious compassion of feelings for spiders' death instead to donate the collection to museums. Such a habit is off course an exception in Japan, and museums are developed good condition to keep specimens as the evidence of nature for the next generation. This act belongs to the social responsibility of each researcher and curator.

Some of your colleagues may remember what I talked at the lecture in the 19th International Congress of Arachnology at Kenting, Taiwan, 2013. The title was "Asia as a gold mine for arachnologists or spider enthusiasts? -- A brief report on the history and present situation of spider taxonomy in Asia", and I explained a part of the history of science in Asia, especially around spiders. Although I was unable to understand religious situation and popular feeling of ordinary people in India in such a short period, I felt that at least a firm natural history museum is indispensable for your country as a strong base of science including study of spiders.

Your career and achievements were brilliant as was kindly explained by the web news of International Society of Arachnology on July 4. The report shows you succeeded everything you did. However, you regrettably passed away leaving some subjects to be solved. I hope your students will try to devote to study spiders and overcome old customs and any walls in economy, ideology and education in accordance with your wish.

Yours truly,  
Hirotsugu Ono